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Tourism and Postcolonialism: The Influences of the Tourism Industry on Social Relationships in French Overseas Departments and Territories

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Title: Tourism and Postcolonialism: The Influences of the Tourism Industry on Social Relationships in French Overseas Departments and Territories

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Abstract:

French overseas departments still preserve noticeable traces from the colonization period. These traces remain and influence the structures of ancient colonies through the values and the social and political systems sustained since colonization. Tourism, as a major part of the economy of those departments, is inclined to perpetuate colonial habits, oppression, and systemic restraints. These traces of colonization are numerous in the tourism system. They can be observed in touristic discourses, in Foucault's (1969) sense, and in the structures shared by touristic stakeholders. Those colonial discourses can even be integrated in the self-image of the host community members (Césaire, 1973, p. 11). Tourism and postcolonial studies, when joined, have the potential to make an important contribution to understand colonialism, as well as colonial manifestations and remains, notably by comparing the nature, actions, and consequences of tourism and colonialism in its original and persisting form.

Hegemony is the main concept chosen to illustrate the phenomenon that occurs in French overseas departments. It is defined as the continuity of the economic, political, and cultural influence of imperial powers on the colonized states and territories, as well as the inequities that persist between north and south (Ferro, 1997, cited in Hall & Tucker, 2004). To this day, that ascendancy is still an integral part of the tourism industry's discourse and organization. For example, exotic and stereotypical images are vastly used as a promise to fulfill the tourist's expectations conducted by their touristic imaginary. This dynamic has a direct effect on cultural "folklorisation" and alienation of host communities. Driven by the need to correspond to those beliefs, host communities will tend to reproduce those images of what tourists feel is their "authentic cultural representation." In a (neo)colonial context, while the culture of the dominant nation prevails, the values of the subaltern culture (Young, 1990) break down and end up in a self-alienation process to comply with the dominant culture (Césaire, 1973, p. 11). Eventually, that disruption of the self-representation of host communities, when combined with the vivid influence of the dominant culture, forces the individual and the community to integrate the ideas of the dominant nation to function, resulting in a process of denial of identity, and leading inevitably to alienation, but also to physical and symbolic displacement.

This research departs from a sociological perspective and proposes to describe the influences of the tourism industry on transformations or extension of social relations specific to a postcolonial context. This research bases its core concepts on theories of C. Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker (2004), which were elaborated from existing studies and through observations on English colonies, and questions the similarities that can also be observed in French territories. This research uses a case study method applied to the French overseas department of La Guadeloupe. It looks at postcolonial discourses in the very production of tourist sites (publicity, use of land, etc.), but also in the life story of slave descent French Caribbean tourist stakeholders. Therefore, the research strategy privileged is participant observations and discourse analysis of the representation of place and culture at tourist sites in Guadeloupe, although it is mainly oriented on general life story interviews. The choice of this last method is motivated by the

desire to present research that will prioritise the voices of the respondents.

Because this research presents a critical perspective on colonialism in its permanent form, it also includes, as its guiding principle, a meta-reflexion on postcolonial academic discourses. Indeed, postcolonialism was crystallized as a concept by Edward Said in his contribution *Orientalism* (1978). What was a critical concept and theory about the western world's intellectual, cultural, physical, economic, and political domination over the eastern world, soon became vastly used by the said western world's social science. Therefore, we remain aware that postcolonial studies are an area of contradiction. It thus felt necessary to insist on prioritising academic voices from the south in the choice of references, to try to counteract the fact that this research is conducted within a western academic privileged context.

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